



West Los Angeles United Methodist Church
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Growing More Christlike Together

West Los Angeles UMC is a Reconciling Congregation and
welcomes all persons regardless of sexual orientation or
gender identity.

West LA Connections

West Los Angeles United Methodist Church Monthly Newsletter | December + February Issue

FEBRUARY

2026

SENIOR PASTOR'S REFLECTION

Grace and Peace, friends!

A February newsletter means that the month of January 2026 has flown by. So much has happened in the past few months.

Here at West LA UMC, we said goodbye to our beloved Rev. Keith and Viki Inouye. On December 21st, we hosted a Retirement Celebration service for the two of them, which was full of laughter, tears, shared memories, and lots of delicious food. So many contributed to the potluck, a testament to the communal love and support for the Inouye family. I know that we will hold them in our prayers as they continue to transition into retirement, trusting God to lead them even now.



Senior Pastor Kiana Nicholson preaches a powerful sermon on January 11, 2026

On our first Sunday of 2026, we had a joint English and Japanese worship service, along with a recognition of this new pastoral appointment. For those who were unable to join us in person, I've included a small piece of my sermon here:

"I want to reiterate how deeply grateful, humbled, and honored I am to be appointed here. I know this is not an ordinary appointment, and I do not take lightly the legacy of faithful leadership that has come before me. In light of this, I wanted to share a few things.

First, I want you to know that as Senior Pastor, I feel a deep commitment to approaching this role with honesty and humility. I could try to pretend that I know everything if I were at the end of a long, 40 year career, but I do not have the luxury of pretending. I have to be honest about what I know and do not know, what I can and cannot do. That said, I think this honesty can be a strength. Though I have been privileged to know many pastors who serve with humility and grace, perhaps we have all seen what can happen on the news or on TV, what happens when a leader becomes filled with pride, establishes a "my way or the highway" approach, and pretends to have all the answers. This might be the most tempting sin of a pastor: to think that we have God, or people, all figured out. The truth is that we are all children in the family of God. We are all learners. No one is above another, and we all need each other. You need my unique contributions, and I need yours. Though we would like to pretend to be independent entities, we are all caught up in a web of interdependence, a dependence upon one another. Howard Thurman, in his Meditation of the Heart, says: "living is itself an act of interdependence. ... however self-sufficient we [think we] are, our strength is always being supplied by others unknown to us..." This is especially true for the church, the body of Christ, which needs all of its unique parts in order to be a healthy body. This appointment, like any pastoral appointment, will only be fruitful if we live into that interconnectedness, together.

Second, I want to express to you my commitment to see the flourishing of this community. While I am no Rev. Keith, and my abilities are quite different from his, he and I both share a deep commitment to the Church, both locally and globally. While young people are sometimes perceived as wanting to forget the past and do all things new, I want you to know that I honor the tradition of this church. While a ministry focus for me is younger generations, I also am passionate about our senior ministries. Maintaining our Senior Fun Day, Grief Support Group, and Thursday Breakfast Bunch remain priorities. I honor the generations of this church, not just those who are here with us in the present, but also those who have moved from this place into rest.

It's been such a privilege to begin the process of getting to know so many of you this past year. I look forward to this year: getting to know you more, learning together, growing together, and becoming more Christlike together."

ALOHA AND BLESSINGS, REV. KEITH AND VIKI INOUYE!

Together with family, friends, and colleagues, Rev. Keith & Viki celebrated their 40+ years in local church ministry with a final Sunday worship service, special retirement program, and reception on Sunday, December 21st. During worship, Ms. Viki sat on the altar steps one last time and shared her love and blessings with the God's Garden kids. Rev. Keith took his last Sunday bow with his sermon entitled "No Small Cast Members in the Drama of God's Saving Grace." He closed playing the guitar and singing, "Welcome to Our World," by Chris Rice. Fellowship with a celebration cake followed.

The celebration and appreciation continued in the afternoon with music, tributes, and blessings. Administrative Board Chair Stan Shimotsu and Deaconess Jeri Okamoto-Tanaka opened with welcome and prayer. Retired Bishop Grant Hagiya shared lighthearted stories of Rev. Keith & Viki in their youth and ministries through the decades. Other speakers (live and by video) included Shari Chang (Faith UMC), Deaconess Jeanne Roe Smith (580 Café/Wesley Foundation Serving UCLA), Gayle Kurasaki (Chair, NJAUMC Camping Board); Mary Sasaki (Wesley UMC); Pastor David Ko; Janice & Kenji Maeda (West LA UMC Senior Fun/Justice Ministries); Rev. Ki Tae Choi (Centenary UMC) and Rev. Eric Iki (Chatsworth West UMC).

The Joyful Noise a capella group kicked off the festivities with their fun rendition of Jingle Bells – "Keith & Viki, We Will Miss You." Accompanist Thomas Gaff sang his adaptation of "Your Song," the Praise Band lifted up "The Prayer" in English and Hawaiian, and the Chancel Choir closed with a moving "Irish Blessing."

Aloha gifts included a travel suitcase filled with surprises, gift card adventures, love offerings, and a basket of hand-decorated cookies featuring the logos of every church that Rev. Keith & Viki served, together with Asian Camp, Reconciling/Rainbow, and other emblems. West LA UMC commissioned a special stained-glass piece handcrafted by Rev. John Woodall.

Incoming Senior Pastor Kiana Nicholson shared her appreciation and blessed the retirees before Rev. Keith closed with his rendition of "The Rainbow Connection," in his best Kermit voice!

The celebration continued with a feast of sweet & savory treats. Guests received Nativity ornament favors to commemorate the occasion as a reminder of the light and love of Christ, as reflected in the ministries of Rev. Keith & Viki Inouye.

Thank you to the Aloha planning team of Pastor Kiana, Deaconess Jeri, Lynne Onishi, Sonia Dixon, Susan Tsukahira, and Thomas Gaff – and to all who made donations and contributed their talents, treats, love, and service to this special send off. Mahalo!



NICHIGO MINISTRY

PASTOR'S NOTE FROM REV. BECKY

Rev. Rebecca Hirata



「新年」

新年明けましておめでとうございます。今年もよろしくお願ひします！

今年は馬年。馬は駆けたり、ジャンプすることが得意。複数の馬が同じ方向へ一団となって早く走る美しい光景を見る時、主の創造を感じてしまいます。

「こういうわけで、このように多くの証人たちが、雲のように私たちを取り巻いているのですから、私たちも、一切の重荷とまとわりつく罪を捨てて、自分の前に置かれている競走を、忍耐をもって走り続けようではありませんか。」(ヘブル12:1)

早く走るために生まれた馬から学ぶことは、ゴールの旗を見失わずに走り抜くことの大しさです。私たちは一人ではありません。先に天に凱旋したアブラハムやモーセやダビデらが、私たちに「がんばれ！」とエールを送っています。天に帰るまで信仰をしっかりと持つことです。応援団長は信仰の父アブラハム。ただ私たちは忍耐をもって走ります。まとわりつく嫌な重荷も罪も十字架に置くことを覚え、今年も信仰の目を上げつつ、主イエス様が与えた人生をしっかりと駆け抜けましょう！

1月より新年聖書ぬりえ大会が開催中です。子ども達が楽しんで参加できることを感謝します。主に特別感謝をもって一年を過ごしましょう！

Akemashite Omedetoo Gozaimasu! (Happy new year!) Kotoshi mo Yoroshiku! (Please be good to each other this year again!) We welcome the New Year with great expectations in the Lord!

This is the Year of the Horse. Horses are good at running and jumping. When we see the beautiful sight of multiple horses running fast together, we can feel the Creator's hand at work.

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us." (Hebrews 12:1)

We can learn from horses about the importance of running the race without losing sight of the finish line. Abraham, Moses, David, and others who have already triumphed in heaven are cheering us on. The head of the cheering squad is Abraham, the father of faith! We will run with perseverance. We will learn to lay down our unpleasant burdens and sins at the cross, and lift our eyes of faith and run the race of life that the Lord Jesus has given us this year!

Since January, we are enjoying the Kodomo New Year Bible story coloring contest. The children participate in this special Oshogatsu event until February to receive "Otoshidama" (New Year money) or special gifts. This is really a blessing from the Lord that we enjoy the church Oshogatsu event! Kansha-shite!(with gratitude)

平田

2月7日(土)シニア弁当

教会ではシニアのメンバーにお弁当を届けます。
ご希望の方は教会オフィスまでご連絡ください。

Café Aloha Senior Bento Delivery on February 7th (Saturday)

Café Aloha ministry would like to reach out to seniors 70 and older by delivering bento. If you are interested in receiving bento, please contact Church office.

メニュー: サラダうどん、味噌汁、菓子、フルーツ
Menu: Udon-salad, Miso-soup, Kashi, Fruits





AN OFFICIAL WELCOME to PASTOR KIANA NICHOLSON!

In keeping with tradition, West LA UMC started the new year with a joint English and Japanese worship service, mochi in lieu of bread during communion, and a festive potluck lunch following.

This first Sunday in January, we also had the pleasure of welcoming Pastor Kiana Nicholson as our new Senior Pastor as of January 1st, following the mid-season retirement of Rev. Keith Inouye. Rev. Becky Hirata and Deaconess Jeri Okamoto-Tanaka led the congregation in the liturgy welcoming and blessing Pastor Kiana in her new appointment, and presented her with the symbolic gifts of UMC ministry to launch Pastor Kiana's appointment with love and grace. On this special day of new beginnings, Pastor Kiana was joined by her husband Dr. Phifer Nicholson, her parents John and Janet Hertogh, brother Logan, and grandmother Kiko.



December and January Altar Flowers were generously given by:

Toshie Setoguchi, Sharon & Chris James in memory of Yosh Setoguchi

Margaret and Howard Halm (may he rest in peace), Mary Ann, and Mori Kawasaki in loving memory of mother Mitsuko Kurashita

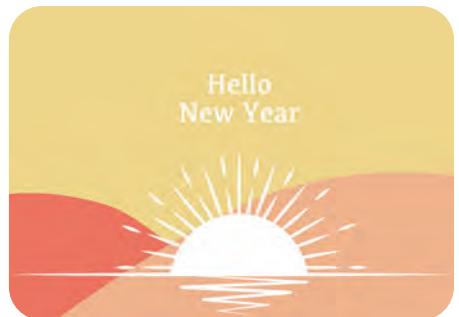
Bill and Loris Hirokawa in celebration of the new year

Mui Koike and Susie Koo in loving memory of their mother's passing

The Shikata family in memory of Mieko Taka, Clarence and Helen Nishizu, and Julie Ann Takamine

STAFF NEWS IN THE NEW YEAR

To left: Pastor Kiana Nicholson and Rev. Becky Hirata pray over the communion elements during the January 4th New Years joint English and Nichigo worship service.



The Staff-Parish Relations Committee is happy to have Lynne Onishi on staff as Administrative Assistant as we transition through Rev. Keith's retirement and Pastor Kiana's appointment as our Senior Pastor. In December, Lynne spent time on-boarding and trained for her new responsibilities, in addition to her seminary field study internship work at West LA UMC. We are grateful and appreciate Lynne's positive, can-do attitude and are confident that she will be able to support the Pastors, staff and church family and perform all required responsibilities! The church office will continue to be open daily during the week from 9am to 1pm, so please don't hesitate to contact the office should you have any questions.

Please join us in congratulating Lynne as we truly appreciate her accepting this position and know she will do an amazing job!

THANK YOU!!

Thank you to all who donated poinsettias that adorned our Sanctuary for our Christmas Sunday service.

Special thank you to: Marilyn & Steve Fujii, Gwen Nagata, Chris Kohler for helping with the delivery and beautifully decorating the Sanctuary.



THANKSGIVING DINNER 2025

2025年感謝祭ディナーパーティの報告

恒例の感謝祭の夕食会を盛会のうちに開催できましたことを報告申し上げます。

2025年は、お弁当の申し込みが30件。NISEIホールでのディナー参加が20名。

朝からローストターキーを中心に、伝統的な感謝祭のメニューを調理して下さった皆様、会場設置、お弁当の箱詰めをお手伝いくださった皆様、心より感謝申し上げます。

特にメインシェフチームのAdam Kim, Bennett Kim, Takumi Takasugi, Naoto Tashiroの面々には毎年美味しいターキーを焼いてくださつて感謝しています。

また、教会の皆様からのドネーション、ご協力を賜りまして感謝祭ディナーを開催できましたこと心より御礼申し上げます。（感謝録は英語参照）

日語部 高橋圭子



2025 Thanksgiving dinner report:

We appreciate that we had great Thanksgiving Dinner at Nisei Hall on November 27, 2025.

We provided a total of 30 Bentos to go and hosted 20 (17 adults and 3 kids) guests for in-person dinner.

[Special thanks]

- **Generous donations** : Eiko Asahina, Robert Bailey, Chimie Hashimoto, Nagisa Mihara, Carole Nakano, Gregory Shikata, Sadao Yotsukura
- **Maintenance oven and Kitchen** : Jared Aoki, Kiana Hertogh-Nicholson, Naoto Tashiro
- **The main chef team**: Adam Kim, Bennett Kim, Takumi Takasugi, Naoto Tashiro
- **Volunteers**: Chieko Takasugi, Katie and Keiko Kuyama, Nikolaus Bugas and Sachiko Takahashi, Len Strickland and Misao Takahashi, Nagisa Mihara, Becky Hirata, Toshio and Keiko Takahashi

With gratitude,
Keiko Takahashi,
Nichigo



SOCIAL & ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE + MISSIONS

On Sunday, January 18, we welcomed new team members and discussed our ideas for our work in 2026. We will meet again on **February 22, 2026**, at **11:15am in the Learning Center** to continue our planning for the year (Please note that this is February 22, the fourth Sunday in the month instead of our typical third Sunday). All who are interested in Justice & Missions work are welcome to attend. Kindly RSVP to Deaconess Jeri at jotwlaumc@gmail.com

West Los Angeles UMC



*Grief Support
Valentine Lunch*

February 12 at 11:30 am
Learning Center

RSVP Jeri at jotwlaumc@gmail.com
by February 8th

Grief Support Group: Thursday, Feb 12th at 11:30AM

Join us on Thursday, February 12th for a special Grief Support Valentine Lunch – a time for sweet memories and sweet treats. RSVP to Jeri at jotwlaumc@gmail.com or the Church Office by February 8th.



Please be aware that there are new email scams circulating, some that look legitimate and appear to be e-vites (email invitations) to social events from our church members. PLEASE DO NOT RESPOND to these emails, or click any links contained in these messages!

If you have received any message that looks suspicious, it's always best to first call and confirm legitimacy with your contacts before opening any email attachments or clicking on any links.

Please stay vigilant, and please help spread the word. THANKS!



Thursday Breakfast Bunch: Thursday, Feb 5th at 8AM

Anyone in our church is welcome to join us for breakfast on the first Thursday of every month! You don't have to be a senior; just an early riser hungry for breakfast and fellowship! The Marie Callender's restaurant is located at **11324 National Blvd, Los Angeles, CA** near the corner of Sawtelle and National Boulevard.



Senior Fun Day: Friday, Feb 27th at 10AM

Our Senior Fun Day gatherings are so much fun! We play board games, enjoy lunch together, play some inventive team challenges, and have really meaningful times sharing about our lives. Please come! We meet in the Nisei Fellowship Hall at church. Please RSVP to Pastor Kiana or call the Church Office if you plan to come.

GOD'S GARDEN - A CALL FOR STAFF & VOLUNTEERS!

God's Garden is looking for support in the new year in several different areas. How might you support ministry for our youth and children this upcoming year?

Paid Part-Time Position:

The church is looking to hire a new Leader of Youth and Children's Ministry. We are looking for someone who will envision and organize our various children's ministry programs, youth programs, conduct administrative duties, and engage the families in the life of the church. If you have any ideas for a person who could be right for this part-time job, please contact Sonia Dixon (SPRC), Susanne Nagata (God's Garden) or Pastor Kiana.

Adult Support on Sundays:

The Youth and God's Garden are also looking for adult support during Sunday Service time. We are looking for volunteers who would like to teach a class themselves or support the teachers. You could commit to as little as once every two months to every week! We are especially in need of volunteers to guide our growing youth group. We are also open to volunteers who would like to give the children's message on Sundays.

Special Interest Shares:

We know our congregation is full of people with many interests. We would love to let our kids make connections with the adults at our church. Do you or someone you know have a special talent, interest, or family tradition that you'd like to share with our little ones or an idea you think would be fun for the kids to do together? We could hold special programs or classes, or it could be a quick visit on a Sunday.

Makerspace:

We are building a Makerspace at church! If you have tools at home that are no longer getting used, we are looking for hand tools (screwdrivers, hammers, etc.). We also need people who can lead a workshop. Do you know how to build a birdhouse? Sew a pillow? What else can you come up with?

If you want to be involved in or have ideas for any of the above opportunities, find Susanne Nagata for a chat, or email her at susanne.nagata@gmail.com

REFRESHMENTS!

The Youth and Children's Ministry have signed up for refreshments!! We have signed up for refreshments after church on four chosen dates (see below). Families of youth and children, please bring in something to share with the church for fellowship after service.

Involve your kids as much as you can...from as little as asking them what kind of snack they would like to share or having them carry the food to church, to having them buy or prepare it themselves. We will have the kids help to set out and serve the food. Thank you for helping to create this service opportunity for the kids!

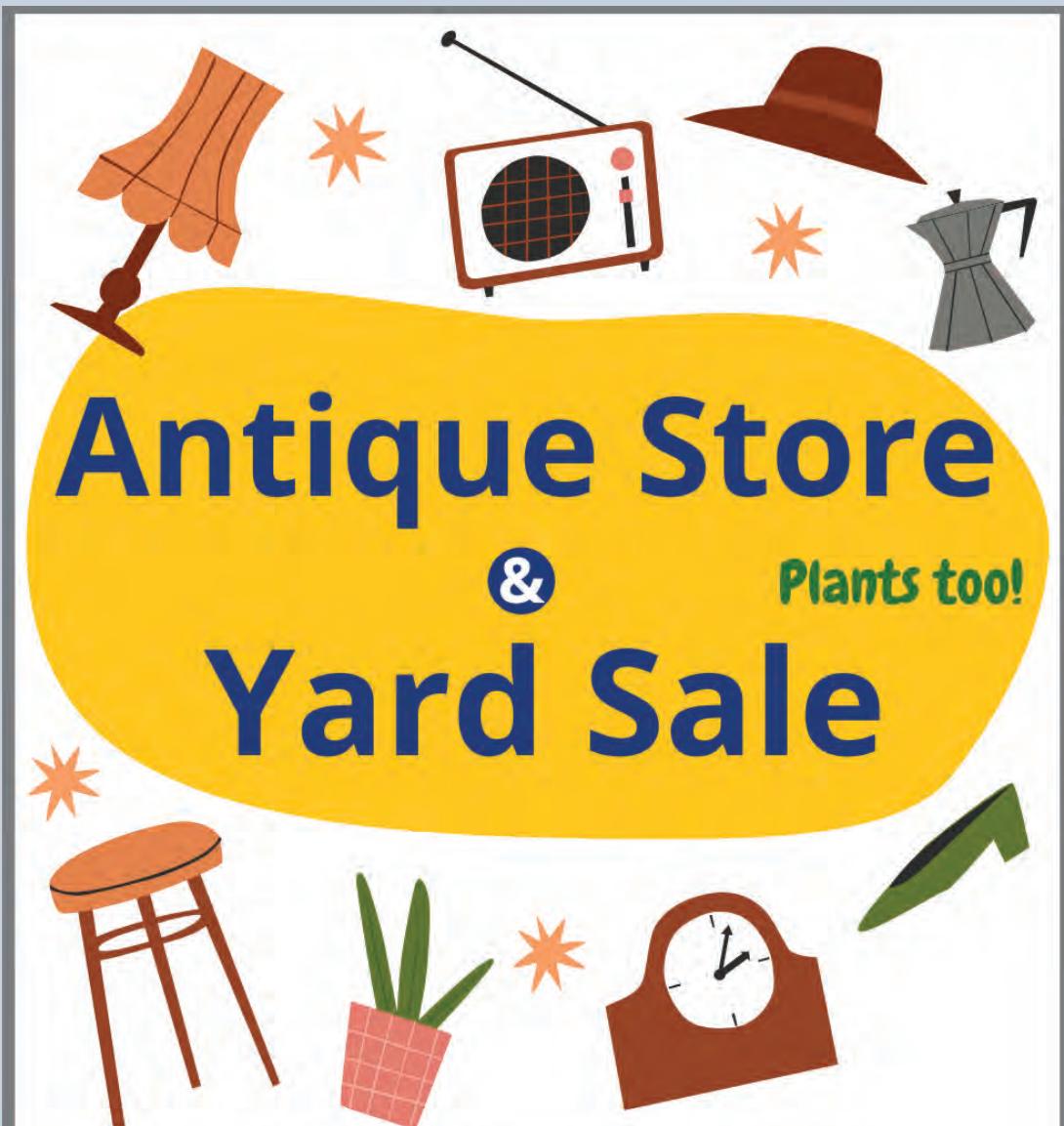
Refreshment dates: Feb 1st, May 3rd, Sept 27, Nov 15



GIRLS DAY KIMONOS!



We will be dressing the girls in kimonos again this year on Sunday, March 1st. Invite a friend who may want to try wearing a kimono! Then, RSVP to Susanne with the number of people who would like to get dressed.



Antique Store
& **Yard Sale**
Plants too!

SATURDAY, MAY 9, 2026

WLA United Methodist Church  **1913 Purdue Ave**
310-479-1379

Image by Freepik

SAVE THE DATE for our Annual All Church Yard Sale and largest fundraiser of the year!
Saturday, May 9, 2026
(Always the day before Mother's Day)

As you complete your New Year's Ō-soji, please hold Treasures & "Junque" aside to donate to this year's sale. We'll provide details on how and when you can contribute your stuff, talents and time in the coming months.

Your 2026 Yard Sale Committee,
Elaine Sunoo, Jane Harada, Kay Yang, Sonia Dixon, Steve Seto

MARCH WITH ARC IN LUNAR NEW YEAR PARADE!



Celebrate the Year of the Horse and join Team West LA UMC as we march in solidarity with the ARC/Asian Pacific Rainbow Coalition in the 127th Annual Golden Dragon Parade in Chinatown on Saturday, February 21st. We will assemble near the parade route before Noon; the parade runs from 1:00 to 4:00 pm (but we won't be walking for 3 hours!). We will gather for refreshments and social time after the parade at a location TBA. To participate, contact Jeri at jotwlaumc@gmail.com or the Church Office.



ASH WEDNESDAY AND LENT IN 2026

As a global church, February marks the transition into a new season: the season of Lent.

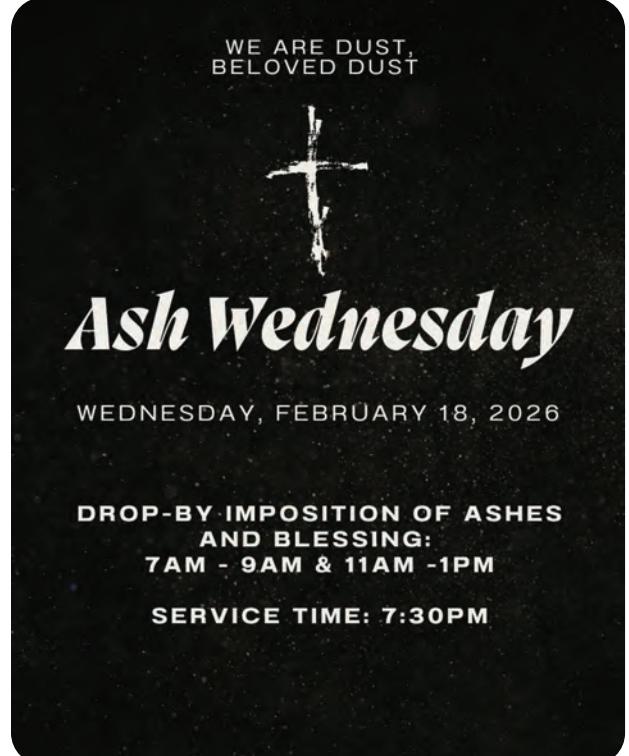
Lent is a forty day season, beginning on Ash Wednesday and lasting until Holy Saturday, the day before Easter. We mark this 40 day season to mirror Jesus' 40 days in the wilderness. During the season of Lent, Christians around the world will focus on themes of repentance and reflection.

West LA UMC, along with our siblings in Christ, will observe Ash Wednesday on Wednesday, February 18th. This year, we will have a variety of ways to participate.

First, we invite you to come by the front gate of the Church for a DROP-BY Imposition of Ashes and/or Blessing. You can come by in the morning, from 7AM - 9AM, or anytime between 11AM to 1PM.

Second, we will have a 7:30 PM Ash Wednesday Service in the West LA UMC Sanctuary. We invite you to attend as we pray, sing, and reflect together. The service will also include an imposition of ashes.

Third, we will have an Online Lenten Study beginning on Wednesday, February 25th, throughout the Wednesdays in Lent. For more information, please contact the Church Office.



CAFE ALOHA REPORT & MEMBER CARE

As we look back on 2025, we're thankful to have celebrated some truly special milestones – including the birthdays of two centenarians: Masako Yotsukura 103, Aki Yagi 101; along with many octogenarians (80-89) and nonagenarians (90-99). What a joy!

With grateful hearts, Café Aloha is excited to share that we have been selected as a recipient of the 2026 Keiro Grant Program. Thanks to this grant, we're able to provide a nutritious, seasonal Japanese meal once a month at no cost to about 64 first-, second-, and third-generation older adults. Café Aloha also allows us the opportunity to connect with them and express God's love and our care for their well-being through conversation in both Japanese and English.

We're deeply thankful for God's continued guidance in this ministry and for the wonderful volunteers who faithfully prepare, package, serve, and make home deliveries.

Our first in-person luncheon/bento of 2026 took place on January 10 in the Nisei Fellowship Hall. Rev. Becky offered a short scripture reading and reflection, Keiko Kikuta led us in gentle chair exercises, David Mann shared his musical gifts, and our volunteers warmly served everyone who attended. It was a lovely time to reconnect, welcome new faces, share laughter, and enjoy being together outside the home. For those who are homebound, bentos were delivered right to their homes.

- Carole Nakano
Member Care – Café Aloha

If you are 70 years or older and would like to receive a bento or help with home deliveries, please contact the church office and leave your name and phone number. Someone will be happy to return your call.



HOLIDAY FUN!

To left: The midpointers (20s-40s) ministry went to Candy Cane Lane with young adults from Faith UMC (Torrance).

Below: Seniors enjoyed Christmas-themed activities and games along with a delicious lunch at December's Senior Fun Day!



Environmental Achievements of 2025

To launch us into an inspired new year, I want to take a moment to rejoice in some positive environmental news of 2025.

Environmental wins don't always get as much exposure as the losses, but it's often the wins that fuel our drive to keep fighting the good fight. So here are some big environmental moments from last year (from the BBC article: Seven Quiet Wins for Climate and Nature in 2025):

- Renewable power sources overtook coal as the world's leading source of electricity (even China saw CO2 emissions fall last year for the first time)
- After decades of negotiations, the High Seas Treaty was ratified, pledging 30% of international waters to become Marine Protected Areas. Some national waters are also seeing additional protections.
- While the going seems slow, Brazil is still making steps to end deforestation of the Amazon rainforest by 2030, and is showing reports that the rate of deforestation is falling.
- The International Court of Justice cleared the way for countries to sue each other over climate change.
- Several endangered species have had remarkable progress this year, including green sea turtles, leatherback sea turtles, and tigers, proving that conservation measures are working.
- Indigenous people were formally recognized at UN level as leaders in the planet's protection and stewardship.
- Just a year after the removal of four Klamath dams in California, salmon have already returned to their spawning grounds, after being absent for generations.

And finally, some of you may remember a few years ago when I spoke about the vaquita (a very small porpoise), which is the most endangered marine mammal, with only fewer than 10 remaining on earth. That number had since dropped to 6-8 since my message. But last year new sightings were confirmed, including at least a few calves, bringing that number back up to 7-10!

-Jamie Thierman

2025 Annual Souper Bowl Sunday Fundraiser



Before the Super Bowl kickoff on Sunday, February 8th, join us after the 9:30 am worship for an array of delicious soups prepared by congregation members. Support our Justice & Missions ministries by partaking and/or by preparing a pot of your favorite soup to share. We also welcome contributions of bread rolls, onigiri, and cookies! Sign-up at church or contact Jeri at jotwlaumc@gmail.com.

SUNDAY WORSHIP SERVICES

In-person Services
9:30 AM—English Worship
11:00 AM—Japanese Worship
Online worship at wlaumc.com

CHURCH OFFICE HOURS

Tuesday-Friday
8:30am-12:30 pm
or call the Church Office at
310-479-1379
to speak to the staff

STAFF

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